DC Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH)

We convened a Community Round Table Meeting in advance of the ICH meeting on September 2nd, 2009. This forum was open to all members of the community, and it was intended to solicit input regarding key issues facing the ICH and those who are homeless in DC. This input was sought to inform the ICH planning process and committees. Participants were asked to reflect on the questions below and to offer their input through small group conversation and/or written comments. The following is a compilation of the discussions during the round table. The ICH is grateful to Schroeder Stribling, Deputy Executive Director at N Street Village, for this summary.

ICH Pre-Meeting Summary

Wednesday, September 2nd, 2009, 1:00-2:00 pm, N Street Village

Topic: Information

1) What would be the most useful 'self-help' information to have available in the shelters?

   a. Access to the 'housing locator' tool of DHCD (use of computers);

   b. Information about healthcare (locations of clinics, and insurance info);

   c. Transportation information (use of computer for metro website, and information on hypothermia van or other shelter transportation services)*transportation was the second most commonly suggested topic item in these responses;

   d. Employment information and support (job fairs in shelters, computer access for job searching, employment postings, job retention support) **employment resources was the most commonly suggested item in these responses;

   e. 'maps' of services in the region (that would show locations of shelters, day services, employment programs, meal programs, etc.);

   f. Money management counseling;

   g. Meals and food program information

2) What are the best ways to provide 'self-help' information and resources for people who are homeless?

   a. Binders of accurate and comprehensive information available for independent use;

   b. Web-based 'WIKI' resource as a good alternative to an actual binder – easier to keep updated and comprehensive;

   c. Access to computers, phones, fax and copiers in an open 'resource center';

   d. Brining health and job fairs directly into the shelters;

e. Need a 'resource person' to staff a 'resource center' – similar to case management but could support mostly self-guided use of binders and computers, or operate a 'kiosk' of information;

f. Need evening and weekend case managers or 'resource person';

g. Using Street Sense for expanded dissemination of information.

Topic: Transportation

3) What are fair practices regarding the availability and operation of the transportation system for those who are homeless, including persons with disabilities?

   a. Free shuttle service should be accessible (there was a lot of conversation about the fact that the hypothermia and shelter vans were not wheelchair-equipped and/or were only equipped to take one wheelchair at a time; also there was discussion about people with disabilities having to wait long periods of time for a van that is able to accommodate them);

   b. Need for sensitivity training for van drivers;

   c. Need for better coordination of van times so that riders are not waiting long periods of time outside programs before/after opening/closing of shelter or day centers;

   d. Providers could operate independent transportation services;

   e. Need for more farecards and tokens;

   f. Free bus access for all people over 60 or those with disabilities, event without Medicaid/are

4) Would you consider a card, such as the DC One Card, that would allow you to access public transportation, the public library, and other services to be an asset? Do you have any problems with a card such as this?

   a. This question elicited very strong and opposing reactions:
      i. One group felt that this 'seemed like a tracking device' – and had many concerns regarding privacy and confidentiality;

      ii. The other group was strongly in favor of the One Card, and felt that this could be pre-loaded with metro fare.

   b. Many concerns were raised about the possibility of One Cards being lost or stolen

Suggestions for future topics:

   a. Program curfews – fair? Reasonable?
   b. Not enough shelters for women
   c. Why is there such a difference in quality of programs? Resources, staff, rules, fairness?
   d. Accommodations for homeless couples or married persons
   e. Staff training – what skills are essential for them to do their job well?
   f. Access to medical care
   g. What are the plans for supporting homeless community regarding flu/swine flu/pandemic?